

ON DEMAND



Skill-sourcing for the agency of the future

A MANIFESTO FOR THE FUTURE

The mass experiment with remote work over the past couple of years has given many businesses the confidence to embrace new ways of working. That includes looking farther afield to find the skills they need. They become more agile by focusing on their core strengths and outsourcing the rest.



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EXPERT CONTRIBUTORS

Andy Seibert

Founder and CEO,
Imprint

Bryn Barlow

Partner,
Open Assembly

Lucy Unger

Design leader

Munni Trivedi

Managing director,
indigo cpo

Martin MacConnol

Founder,
Wardour

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AGENCY ECONOMICS ARE CHANGING



Clients want more for less. Talent is scarce. Margins are under pressure. The predicted recession will sharpen these pain points.

Gone are the fixed retainers and chunky margins of yesteryear. Much creative work is now commissioned on a project basis and that means less visibility and bigger peaks and troughs in workflows.

By 2028,

73%

of all departments are expected to have remote workers according to Upwork.

Technology is changing rapidly. This means the number of communications' channels has exploded and data-driven customer segmentation increases demand for personalisation.

To service clients, agencies need access to a diverse set of skills, simultaneously, but often for a short duration. They need to be agile and quickly scale up and down. Talent shortages mean agencies are chasing the same limited pool of freelance resources.

To be economically viable, agencies need to shift fixed internal talent costs to variable external costs without compromising their ability to deliver.

The agency of the future is one with a strong creative core and access to a network of on-demand resources.

DO MORE WITH LESS

Traditionally agencies say:
"Fast, good, cheap. Choose two."

Why not offer your clients all three?

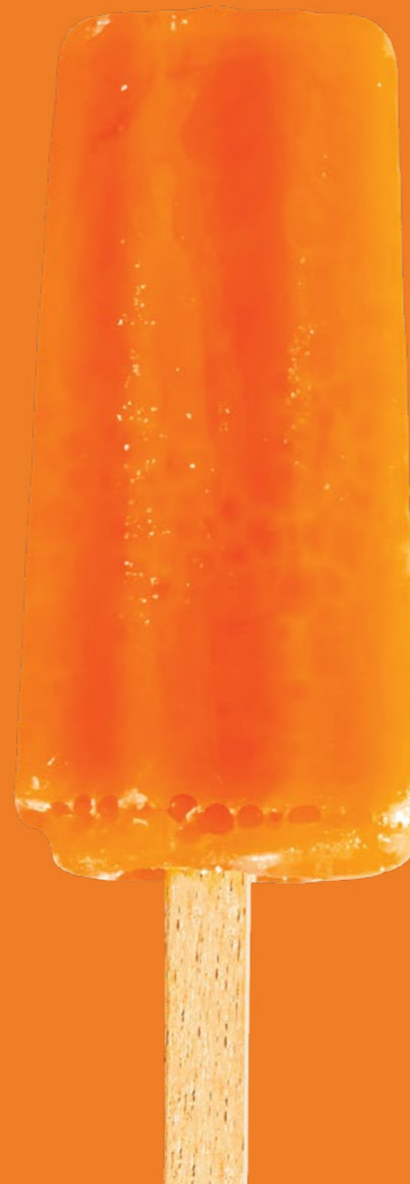
FASTER

+

BETTER

+

CHEAPER



WE'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE

Cloud computing transformed the way companies think about, and access, technology.

Corporate IT budgets exploded as technology became business critical. Businesses hired developers, database managers, data scientists and built massive data centres at huge capital expense.

Along came cloud computing and changed the way enterprises buy

technology. Software as a Service (SaaS), and its cousins Infrastructure as a Services (IaaS) and Platform as a Service (PaaS), let businesses configure stacks to their individual needs. They get on-demand, pay-as-you-go, access to the tools they need – and only when they need them. **Costs have moved. What was fixed is now variable.**

Those same principles can be applied to the sourcing of skills.

“The real gangster move is to be capital light, that is, to have a variable cost structure.”



Scott Galloway
Professor, NYU Stern
School of Business,
from his book *Post
Corona-From Crisis
to Opportunity*



5 ACTIONS TO SET YOU UP FOR FUTURE SUCCESS

#1 EMBRACE HYBRID

In the past couple of years, the term 'hybrid' has become shorthand for a mix of work-from-office and work-from-home. That is the tip of the iceberg. Its real potential is much greater.

A hybrid or 'networked' organisation is one that looks outside its own walled garden to find and recruit talent. It recognises that it must flex to meet the needs of the market and to keep ahead of its competitors. This can take many forms.

A core of in-house staff can be supplemented by external resources. A hybrid organisation may use marketplaces to access hard-to-find skillsets or answers to tough challenges. This company will be comfortable employing freelancers. Its network will include outsourcing

partners who can provide skills at scale to meet peaks in demand and extend the agency's service offering.

The successful agency of the future will be a hybrid organisation. It will invest in its creative core—its strategic talent—and build an ecosystem around that core that allows it to access the skills and resources it needs on-demand.

This requires a change of mindset.

Leaders and managers must be able to see the value that's created by these types of flexible and scalable models and be willing to let go of old ways of thinking about how work gets done. The past two years has proved that being physically present in a studio is not the determinant of quality or productivity.



Bryn Barlow
Partner,
Open Assembly

"The definition of what is non-core over the last few years has exploded. So, the variety of different types of things that people are going to the market to get done for them is at an all-time high."

ON DEMAND

#2 TASKIFY

One of the keys to hybrid working is to break work down into its constituent parts.

This is part of the mindset shift. It's a move away from thinking about roles and FTEs and towards work as a set of tasks. If these become discrete packages then they can be parcelled up and done concurrently and remotely by different people at different price points.

It's the operating model behind Uber. The company has broken the job of 'getting a taxi' into its constituent parts: finding, or ordering, a taxi; giving directions; finding a route; getting from A-B; rerouting to avoid congestion; collecting a fare; tipping; giving a review. By breaking the 'journey' into tasks, Uber has removed friction and made the experience of moving from A-B easier and smoother. It's also become cheaper.

The approach can be applied to knowledge work or creative work.

Take the tasks of a corporate video producer. She creates and develops audio visual content for many purposes. In-house producers will script, storyboard, and select forms of media to meet the brief. They also scout, select, and reserve shoot locations and develop production schedules. Once the raw film is 'in the can' there are a host of post-production tasks which can be 'lifted and shifted'. These may include importing files; organising raw media; editing footage and sound files; creating and inserting graphics; sub-titling; adding music and voice-over and special effects; and uploading to platforms and channels.

These tasks are vital to the project but not part of the agency's core creative offering. They can be outsourced.



Andy Seibert
Founder and CEO,
Imprint

"The film world has led the way. Hollywood has been run on these principles for decades. Now other parts of the creative world seem to be catching on. At last!"

Skill-sourcing for the agency of the future

#3 BUILD FROM WITHIN

The idea of a hybrid organisation as described here requires a strong core around which flexibility and scalability are built.

In an agency that means a laser-like focus on client relationships. The user experience of an agency is often a missed opportunity. It's vital that clients find you easy to deal with. Agency UX is part of the core. So is the ability to generate a constant stream of novel and relevant ideas. An agency might outsource some thinking and innovation to its partners, but those ideas must be sense checked and ratified. The core is the arbiter of ideas.

The agency must retain a rigorous understanding of its clients' brands and their business objectives. A strong creative director will know the brand's history and what's been tried. What worked? What didn't? Why? She is part of the core.

Outsourcing won't compromise any of these core activities. The people who do these things need not be fearful of this new approach. It will enhance their ability to focus on the areas where they add the most value.

Those at the core should be involved in building the hybrid model. They are the 'quality circles' that know what the agency's strengths are and they also know its weaknesses. Letting your people reimagine what the agency can look like will improve your chances of success. It will highlight areas of concern and allow you to address fears. This process will give you clarity about what is core and sacrosanct and what is non-core and can be considered for outsourcing.



Martin MacConnol
Founder,
Wardour

"I've spent my life saying to the leadership team, we need to boost the power of our networks and I see outsourcing as being an absolutely pivotal part of that."

#4 CREATE SHARED VALUE

Hybrid means not all the work gets done in-house. Some work is being parcelled up and done within your network whether by freelancers, contractors, or outsourcing partners.

Cost savings are often cited as the primary motivation to outsource. It will always be part of the equation whether by finding lower rates or because shifting costs from fixed to variable is every CFO's dream. But finance and procurement shouldn't be the only parties structuring the deal and lower cost is not the only value to be captured.

The best outsourcing is based on shared value – where each party receives a 'fair share' and can see a win-win.

The most successful outsourcing relationships are built on trust, transparency, and reciprocity. Co-creating a model that serves the interests of all parties is the goal. By including the core team in the planning you will identify the areas where the greatest value can be created. Outsourcing should offer access to a range of skills so that in times of peak demand the partner can step in with added firepower. That requires an ongoing dialogue and planning so that relevant, pre-vetted resources are in place.

Visibility on workflows always helps to capture that potential value. Planning for peaks in demand, identifying when hard-to-find skills are needed should form the basis of volume discounts. This might be balanced with surge pricing when work comes at short notice.



Lucy Unger
Design leader

"I would always recommend that an agency has a process that suits who they are in the world. It always needs to be scalable; it always needs to be flexible."

#5 COMMUNICATE WITH CLARITY

In their book *Smarter Outsourcing* (Prentice Hall, Financial Times), authors Jean-Louis Bravard and Robert Morgan write: 'Our experience has confirmed time and again that the three most important watch words in managing the transition to an outsourcing arrangement are communication, communication, communication.'

It's obvious, but often forgotten. Any change within an organisation needs good communication. Any relationship thrives, or fails, on the quality of communication.

Embracing hybrid; breaking work into tasks; introducing new partners into the system are all changes. People are fearful of change. That's particularly true when change is not clearly articulated, and folks don't feel they have been given a chance to express their views.

Clear and consistent communication between the agency and outsourcing partner is vital. This can happen in lots of ways whether at the time of establishing the relationship, agreeing KPIs or other service level agreements, or on a day-to-day basis as projects flow back and forth. UX for the agency is integral to the success and that should include lots of regular, honest two-way communications.

When outsourcing relationships fail it's very often not to do with the technical capabilities of the parties but issues with communication.



Munni Trivedi
Managing director,
indigo cpo

“Clear communications are integral to building a networked organisation. Ironically businesses that sell communications aren't always the best at communicating. Take nothing for granted.”

INDIGO CPO: THE AGENCY'S AGENCY

We've run agencies so we understand the pressure you feel on margins and the link between production efficiency and profitability.

We add time and firepower so you can achieve more with less.

Our clients are agencies specialising in marketing, branding, publishing, communications, and research. They enjoy cost and operational benefits and say we are responsive, agile, and reliable.

We are an extension to your studio.

This handbook is brought to you by:
Mark Hannant, Munni Trivedi, and Ritika Arya

Designed by [teammagenta](#)

LET US HELP YOU DO MORE WITH LESS

Get in touch

munni.trivedi@indigocpo.com



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